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Migration is not a transient event but a fundamental part of our societies. It drives the cultural, political, and economic vitality of the WHO European Region, and the health of migrants and refugees is inseparable from the overall health of our populations. Europe and Central Asia have a notably high proportion of international migrants—around 101 million people, or more than a third of the global total of 281 million.

Migrants, especially labor migrants, form a significant part of our communities. Refugees and migrants in Europe and Central Asia generally share the same health needs as the local populations, but they are often at higher risk of poor health. These risks arise both during their journey and upon arrival in destination countries due to factors such as dangerous migration routes, inadequate living conditions, and sudden lifestyle changes. Their health and well-being are further impacted by restrictive migration policies, legal status issues, economic difficulties, and anti-migrant attitudes. As a result, many refugees and migrants face significant obstacles in accessing healthcare—whether in their home countries, during transit, or after settling in host countries. Navigating unfamiliar healthcare systems often presents additional challenges. Unlike host communities, refugees and migrants may have limited access to health services, often restricted to emergency care, which can be difficult to obtain. Language barriers, as well as the high cost of healthcare, further hinder their ability to receive adequate treatment, putting their physical and mental health at great risk. Male migrant workers are particularly vulnerable to occupational injuries, especially in high-risk sectors like construction and mining.

Acknowledging these challenges and the need to address both immediate and long-term health needs, all EAEU Member States fully supported the new Action Plan on Refugee and Migrant Health during the 73rd session of the WHO Regional Committee for Europe in Astana, Kazakhstan. This action plan addresses crucial areas, including ensuring universal health coverage (UHC) for migrants, implementing inclusive emergency response policies, fostering public health environments that support social cohesion, and advancing evidence-based migration health governance enabling partnership.

Ensuring safe, dignified migration that protects the right to health requires effective migration governance and cross-regional collaboration. By ensuring equitable healthcare access and addressing the social factors influencing health, we can foster healthier communities for everyone.

Several countries, both within and outside the EAEU, have implemented successful strategies to address the health needs of migrants. Kyrgyzstan issued a presidential decree endorsing the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration, aiming to enhance migrant rights, reduce irregular migration, and promote sustainable development in the country.

Effective migrant health strategies go beyond merely improving healthcare access. They address broader social determinants of health and promote inclusivity within health systems, benefiting both migrants and host communities.

The health needs of migrants continue to evolve, and our strategies must adapt accordingly. Continuous partnership between the WHO Regional Office for Europe (EURO), the EAEU, and its Member States remains crucial.

Our joint focus should be on strengthening health systems, advancing health equity, and ensuring that every individual—regardless of their background—has access to the care they need. By combining our expertise and resources, we can address the remaining gaps and build a more inclusive and resilient healthcare system for all.